

***PRESENTATION OF THE
“FBI MEDAL FOR MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT”***

***Acceptance speech by Prefetto Giovanni De Gennaro
Chief, Italian National Police***

***Friday, December 8th, 2006
J. Edgar Hoover Building, Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC***

Director MUELLER, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I live this important stage of my professional life marked by the presentation of the “*FBI Medal for Meritorious Achievement*” with understandable emotion, and I’m grateful to the many friends and to my family attending here today if I manage to overcome the feelings of this moment.

Receiving such a prestigious decoration from the FBI, to which I’m bound by deep feelings of closeness and friendship, represents the highest token of appreciation for the efforts, and the results achieved in more than thirty years of professional activity, constantly devoted to law, justice and the security of our citizens.

Thank you, Director MUELLER, for giving me the privilege of being the first foreigner, as well as the first non-FBI official, to receive such an outstanding recognition.

Today, more than ever, I don’t consider myself a “stranger” within the walls of this historical building.

Indeed, the presentation of this medal implies that you regard me as a full member of your great “family”.

I said “more than ever” because I already felt part of this “family” for the strong bond of shared life and for the human and professional relationship that has been going on for more than 25 years.

A quarter of a century has gone by since I first came to the United States to cooperate to the investigation on the connections between the Sicilian “*Cosa Nostra*” and the Italian-American “*Mafia*”.

Several other operations followed the first on.

Sometimes I even woke up wondering whether I was in Rome, in Palermo or in New York.

That’s how the relationship of increasing trust and cooperation with your law enforcement agencies was established and strengthened, leading to remarkable achievements in the fight against serious organized crime.

It sounds like an old story, doomed to be forgotten in the memory book like other “war tales”.

But this story is terribly up-to-date.

September 11, 2001 didn’t find us unprepared, because that story carved in our hearts and in our minds a methodology, a culture, a deep feeling of friendship based on the determination to fight the common enemy, regardless of whether it disguised himself as a mobster, or a as terrorist.

Based on such strong background, I’m determined to show the way to the next generations of Italian and American law enforcement officers, since during my entire career, largely spent in a constant and stubborn struggle against crime around the world, I had the chance to appreciate and learn the working methods, the management skills and the operational efficiency of my FBI colleagues.

In any circumstance, I always honoured their friendship with my loyalty, respecting and loving their Nation and its laws just as I love and respect my own Country and its laws.

From New York to Palermo, from Rome to Miami, I spent days and nights with many of you to bring dangerous criminals to justice.

In some cases, we even risked our lives together.

These circumstances taught us how to walk together along the way of legality.

These permanent statements will light the way of those who will be willing to walk along it, following our example.

In my FBI colleagues I found the same principles I have always believed in.

These ideals brought us together and that still bond us together and still bind us in the same manner as day-to-day life and common values keep together a family.

Our family, not unlike any other, has not only had moments of happiness and success.

We lived our days of deep sorrow, and together we mourned the loss of some of our “road companions”.

I’m sure that in this very moment most of us are thinking about a very special one: our common friend Giovanni FALCONE.

I’m sure that hadn’t he been murdered by the blind and brutal violence of the Mafia on that tragic afternoon of 14 years ago, he would have been with us even today, proud and glad to see and hug again so many friends and colleagues who witnessed and took part to the successful investigations of those years.

Maybe all of us, including myself, would have agreed upon awarding him the decoration that I am receiving from you today.

I feel it right, then, to dedicate this medal to his memory and to the memory of so many Italian officers who are no longer with us, as they have sacrificed their lives for the common benefit.

In their sacrifice and exemplary devotion we found inside us the strength and the determination that allowed us to join our efforts and to build a model of cooperation between our law enforcement agencies, worth of being held up as an example to all our partners, everywhere in the world.

During summits and international meetings, I have often been asked by many colleagues about the formula of the successful cooperation between Italy and the United States in the fight against crime.

I gave the same answer to all of them: the efficiency of our partnership is not due to any particular alchemy, but the result of a simple strategy, based on three fundamental pillars: mutual trust, experience sharing and the ability of the Italian and

American investigators to work side by side, like members of the same team in pursuit of common goals.

Director, I have outlined these memories and thoughts only to prove that the honour that you gave me has brought back to my mind a whole world of feelings and passions, and to renew my profound gratitude for having awarded me, the Chief of the Italian Police, with the “*FBI Medal for Meritorious Achievement*”.

That’s why, dear Bob, that today I have to thank you not only on a personal basis, but also from an institutional standpoint, because this medal hasn’t been awarded only to me or to my professional history.

I consider your token of appreciation as a symbolic acknowledgment of the professional skills and of the devotion of all the men and women of the Italian Police, that I am honoured to represent.

The Italian National Police is a time-honoured law enforcement agency, proud of its history but resolutely projected to the future, and used to consider any accomplishment or token of appreciation not as the ultimate target, but as an encouragement to improve the level of the service rendered to the citizens, and as an incentive to keep performing its duties with renewed enthusiasm and self-abnegation.

Director, I would like to share this medal with all my agents, down to the youngest officer who’s name will never be known to the public, but who’s daily contribution to the security of our citizens truly represents - even if it’s not often perceived so - a real act of self-sacrifice, and sometimes of genuine heroism: they are the unknown, everyday “next-door heroes”.

I wish to close my speech with these thoughts, and to express my deep and heartfelt thankfulness to the many distinguished colleagues and friends who have honoured me today with their attendance and that, standing by me and my family, have showed their appreciation and affection on one of the most important days of my professional life.